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RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0974
RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR 1337
RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA 1765
RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 4183
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1536
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME 2198
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0829
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC//DHO-7//
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RHMFIASS/Joint STAFF WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1925
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC
RUCPDOC/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 000857

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NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR B. PITTMAN
USAID FOR L.DOBINS AND E. LOKEN
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU
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TAGS: PHUM ELAB ZI

SUBJECT: LABOR ACTION LOOMS IN ZIMBABWE

REF: A. 06 HARARE 01163
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Classified By: Poloff Scott Higgins, reason: 1.4 d

The Tale of Two Zimbabwes -- April and Today

11. (U) The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), the country's largest labor group, is calling for a two-day stay-away on September 19-20 to protest a recent ban on wage increases and worsening socio-economic conditions. During the past week, ZCTU has placed announcements for the stay-away in the three independent weekly newspapers and has distributed flyers to drum up support for the labor action. Additionally, ZCTU organizers hope to leverage the wide media coverage of the one-year anniversary of the government's brutal attacks on senior ZCTU leaders during a demonstration on September 13, 2006 (reftel A).

12. (U) In April, the government used a massive show of force to quickly diffuse the last ZCTU stay-away, which had initially shown signs of solid support and growing momentum (reftel B). ZCTU Information Officer Khumbulani Ndlovu pointed out to us on September 18 that, since April, the mood has grown significantly more restive as a result of the prolonged shortages, and Zimbabweans were looking for a way to express their frustrations.

13. (U) For its part, the government has taken several steps to quell support for the stay-away. In a typical move meant to foster confusion among workers, the latest edition of the government-controlled Sunday Mail carried the headline

"Salaries Not Frozen." Additionally, ZCTU President Wellington Chibabe reported that, during the past week, security agents had hauled in labor leaders in Bulawayo, Masvingo, Plumtree and Mutare for interrogation. Ndlovu told us that police had arrested three ZCTU members on September 17 for distributing flyers about the stay-away in an industrial area of Harare. The three remain in custody pending charges; however, contrary to press reports, Ndlovu said that they were not severely assaulted. There were also reports that security agents were visiting businesses and threatening workers to show up for work.

A Question of Tactics

14. (C) ZCTU affiliate leaders Raymond Majongwe, general secretary of the Progressive Teachers' Union of Zimbabwe

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(PTUZ), and Gertrude Hambira, general secretary of the General Agriculture and Plantation Workers' Union of Zimbabwe (GAPWUZ) told poloff on September 19 that while they were hoping for a successful stay-away, they questioned the concept of the planned labor action. With 80 percent unemployment and more jobs being lost every day, Zimbabweans were already staying home, so what was the point of the action? Adding to poor chances of success was poor communication to workers -- the ZCTU executive council did not provide the affiliates with flyers about the stay-away until September 15.

Comment

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15. (C) Despite tremendous dissatisfaction of most Zimbabweans with the current economic situation, and despite the optimism of some ZCTU leaders that the stay-away will be successful, a combination of low employment, lack of knowledge about the stay-away, and government intimidation would seem to indicate low participation. We will monitor the extent of participation and the government response. End Comment.
DHANANI